

## **DESERT SUCKER (Gila Mountain Sucker)**

*(Catostomus clarki)*

**STATUS:** No Federal status.

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The desert sucker grows to approximately 13 inches (33 cm) in length. Its color varies from green to silver or tan above and silver to yellow below. During the spawning season breeding males develop a striped pattern consisting of one or two light lateral stripes on a darker background. The desert sucker has a downward-pointed mouth with an enlarged cartilaginous ridge behind the lower lip.

**NATURAL HISTORY:** The desert sucker is omnivorous; it feeds on diatoms and algae that grow on cobbles and boulders. It uses the cartilage ridge below its lower lip to scrape food items from stream channel bottom. Any animal material present within the algae would also be eaten. Young sucker fry feed primarily on small aquatic insects such as midge and black fly larvae

Desert suckers reach maturity in their second year. Spawning occurs from January through May. Spawning occurs in gravel bars involving one female and two or more males. The female creates a depression in the gravel then deposits eggs which are fertilized by the males. The eggs, buried in the loose gravel, hatch in a few days.

In Arizona, the desert sucker is highly co-existent with the Sonoran sucker (*Catostomus insignis*), a subordinate species. It has been reported that the two species hybridize in Aravaipa and Bonita creeks.

**HABITAT:** Adult suckers live in pools, moving at night to feed on gravel-cobble riffles. Young inhabit riffles throughout the day, feeding on aquatic insects.

**RANGE: Historical:** Desert suckers are found in the Bill Williams River, Gila River, and Virgin River basins in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and northern Sonora, Mexico. In Nevada, it is found in the Virgin River, White River (White Pine County), and Meadow Valley Wash (Clark County).

**Current:** Desert suckers still occur over a relatively broad area and are currently found in river and stream systems throughout their historical range.

**REASONS FOR DECLINE:** The species is stable throughout most of its range. Alteration of historical flow regimes and construction of reservoirs have diminished available running-water habitat. Habitat is also lost when poor land management increases sedimentation which covers diatoms and algae growing on channel substrate. In addition, non-native fish stocking has increased competition with and predation on desert suckers.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** National Forests, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Bureau of Land Management, Tribal, State of Arizona, and private lands.